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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 34th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 21 July 1992, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. MROZIEWICZ (Poland)

later: Mr. AMAZIANE (Morocco)
(Vice-President)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued) (E/1992/63, E/1992/90 and E/1992/99)

REVITALIZATION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued) (E/1992/86 and E/1992/101)

ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW SUBSIDIARY BODIES OF THE COUNCIL (continued) (E/1992/76)

Mr. KHAN (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, said that the high-level segment had provided a unique opportunity to discuss matters of common interest with a view to collective international action. The active participation of heads of agencies and institutions had been very useful. The Council, in pursuing the overall objectives of revitalization, should have due regard to General Assembly resolution 45/264 and the fundamental principle that the General Assembly was the supreme policy-making organ of the United Nations.

The holding of one consolidated, substantive session had delayed confirmation of the mandates of special representatives/rapporteurs and working groups on human rights. The mandates had therefore had to be provisionally approved, on an exceptional basis, at a reconvened organizational session. The Council should not allow such a situation to recur, and should convene as early as possible. If necessary, subsidiary organs should adjust their schedules without asking the Council itself to make adjustments.

While the revitalization exercise was intended to enhance the role of the Council in the economic and social fields, the supreme political policy-making organ remained the General Assembly. The exercise should result in increased efficiency, greater complementarity with the work of the General Assembly, an avoidance of duplication, and an integrated approach to social issues.

(Mr. Khan, Pakistan)

The Group of 77 looked forward to participating in the open-ended ad hoc working group proposed by the President and agreed with the Secretary-General that there was a need to conduct a periodic review of progress made in implementing the International Development Strategy.

Mr. MARTIN (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the 12 member States of the European Community, said that some of the revitalization procedures proposed in Economic and Social Council resolutions 1988/77 and 1989/114 had been made redundant by the adoption of General Assembly resolution 45/264, and should be discarded. Further, the themes for the high-level segment should not be determined on the basis of the multi-year work programme, but should be selected by the Council at its organizational session on the basis of topicality, with a balance between economic and social questions.

Themes for the coordination segment, on the other hand, should be chosen on the basis of a work programme, but there must be enough flexibility to enable the Council to examine specific problems of coordination as they arose. The demonstrated usefulness of the new coordination segment suggested that the future of the joint meetings of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and the Committee for Programme and Coordination should be reconsidered. There was an urgent need for the Administrative Committee on Coordination, on the basis of enhanced policy guidance from the Council, to discuss ways in which specialized agencies could better perform their functions. The Council was not monitoring the agencies adequately.

While the current session had been much more purposeful and action oriented, there was still scope for improvement. Documentation still arrived too late, preventing adequate preparation. The fault did not lie with delegations for asking for too much documentation. In that context, Secretariat officials should not approach delegations with draft resolutions containing requests for unnecessary documentation.

While the new arrangements for the organizational segment were working, on the whole, there should be no need for three meetings of the organizational session, as had happened in 1992. The Council should re-examine the way in which it confirmed the mandates of its subsidiary bodies, particularly in the human rights field.

(Mr. Martin, United Kingdom)

It was clearly important to ensure that the newly established subsidiary bodies of the Council acted in a coordinated manner. In particular, adjustments might be required to accommodate the proposed Commission on Sustainable Development, which would undoubtedly have an impact on the whole United Nations system. Careful consideration should be given to the consolidated mandates of the new subsidiary bodies of the Council proposed by the Secretary-General (E/1992/76). In the case of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development, for example, mandates arising from Agenda 21 should be integrated with those of its predecessor committee to produce an intellectually coherent agenda. The European Community delegations were willing to engage in consultations to that end.

Concern that the Council frequently duplicated the Assembly's work had led to calls for a review - which was to be held at the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly - on ways of coordinating the work of the Council and the Assembly. While the Council's structure had been radically changed by General Assembly resolution 45/264, its agenda remained unchanged. Accordingly, the European Community delegations felt that the time had come to overhaul the Council's agenda and eliminate superfluous items. The aim should be to ensure that the level of the Council's proceedings throughout the session was on a par with that achieved at the high-level segment.

Turning to the question of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), he noted that the number of NGOs in consultative status had grown steadily. Non-governmental organizations made a significant contribution to the work of the United Nations. The European Community delegations supported participation by NGOs in all appropriate forums, including human rights bodies - where their participation was essential. A wide range of non-governmental organizations had participated in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held at Rio de Janeiro, and had a crucial role to play in upcoming international meetings. In that connection, the General Assembly would need to determine the means of participation of non-governmental organizations in the proposed Commission on Sustainable Development.

(Mr. Martin, United Kingdom)

The European Community delegations welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the Non-Governmental Organizations Unit (E/1992/63), whose workload had increased dramatically. Adequate resources should be made available to the Unit to enable it to carry out its functions effectively. The Unit should act as a channel for liaison between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, and not pass the task on to Member States.

Mr. LICHEM (Austria) said that four major functions had been entrusted to the Council. In general, the programme-approval and monitoring function had been discharged well, and the proposed Commission on Sustainable Development would add an important dimension to the Council's responsibilities. Equally, the Nordic initiative could expand the Council's involvement in the development strategy function.

The coordination function entrusted to the Council had proved difficult to discharge owing to the complex intersectoral, interdisciplinary and inter-agency nature of economic and social affairs. The fragmentation of responsibility for the three major sectors of economic affairs, social affairs and the environment and natural resources had been compounded by piecemeal institutional growth reflecting the different priorities of different times. The Council was now moving to discharge its coordination function more effectively than in the past. Nevertheless, "centrally planned" coordination could only do so much; each organization would still need to respond to the specific challenges arising in its area of competence.

The overall economic and social policy assessment and guideline function had been performed least satisfactorily by the Council, which had not exercised any leadership in global economic policies. The introduction of the high-level segment, however, augured well for the future.

The Council's failure to discharge its coordination and overall policy functions, a failure that was all the more serious as sustainable development was becoming a key criterion, was the main reason for the marginalization of the Council. Revitalization efforts must address the gaps identified in those two crucial functions.

The Council might find it productive to consider contemporary industrial management theory as it related to decentralized units. The major tools

(Mr. Lichem, Austria)

of relevance were the provision of an adequate framework and clear leadership through well-defined overall objectives.

Whether the Council could apply modern industrial management techniques to achieve leadership within a highly fragmented system, to streamline activities in the economic and social fields, to offer overall objectives for environment and development issues and to bring its normative authority to bear was related to the question of establishing a system of integrated reports. Such reports could serve as a basis for comprehensive analysis and policy formulation, while the facts presented would provide guidance and thus exercise a degree of normative power over the multitude of decision makers. It was surprising that the United Nations had yet to prepare such comprehensive reports, rather than the specialized reports it confined itself to.

Specifically, the Council could consider issuing sectoral reports on the world economic situation, the world social situation and the state of the environment, and a fourth report highlighting the interrelations between those three sectors. The Council should devote its attention above all to the fourth, comprehensive report. Such a comprehensive report on the state of the environment and development would provide a basis for policies and priorities relating to sustainable development, and offer clear choices to the multitude of actors in the economic and social fields. Further, such a system of reporting would address existing lacunae with regard to coordination and policy guidance.

A two-way information flow would bring sectoral data and assessments from the United Nations system to the Council, while comprehensive analysis and policy recommendations would flow from the Council to the various agencies. Such a process would yield "soft" yet effective coordination throughout the system, since decision-making bodies were unlikely to base their decisions on assumptions that conflicted with data contained in the reports or to guidelines adopted by the Council. The same was true of Governments and the private sector.

The Secretary-General had rightly pointed to the possible need for the Council to provide information of relevance to questions of international peace and security, which the system his delegation was proposing could generate.

(Mr. Lichem, Austria)

Such a system would first require the establishment of an ad hoc working group to define the details. Next the Administrative Committee on Coordination could prepare concrete schedules and criteria for reporting. Lastly, the Council could adopt an overall scheme for the reports in coordination with the specialized agencies, perhaps on a triennial basis. The high-level segment of the Council could debate a first such comprehensive report on the state of the environment and development in 1995.

Mr. GORELIK (Russian Federation) noted that the success of the high-level segment had paved the way for speeding up the reform process essential to the revitalization of the Council. More impetus should be given to the efforts of the ad hoc working group in the task of drawing up a wide range of reforms, inter alia, by seeking to promote agreement on a number of practical measures to support the process initiated by General Assembly resolution 45/264.

If the various proposals were implemented, the Council's sessions would consist of four segments: a high-level segment, an expanded coordination segment, an operational activities segment and plenary meetings. The risk of overlapping and repetition could be reduced by discontinuing the Council's Economic and Social Committees.

Discussion in the coordination segment at the current session had shown the Council's potential for coordination within the United Nations system. That segment was bound to benefit if general coordination issues were discussed after thematic topics had been considered. Intergovernmental and inter-agency coordination, too, would be further enhanced if the Secretary-General, as Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, could invite the President of the Council and the Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, and perhaps the Council's officers, to take part in certain ACC meetings. The representative of the United Kingdom, speaking on behalf of the European Community, had raised an interesting point regarding Joint Meetings of CPC and ACC. If their functions were transferred to the coordination segment of the Council the latter would become the most authoritative forum for discussions among Governments, specialized agencies and the international financial institutions. The

(Mr. Gorelik, Russian Federation)

Council should request the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its next substantive session, his proposals on delineating responsibilities within the United Nations system.

His delegation supported the call for increased resources made by the Chairman of the Economic Commission for Europe (E/1992/101). As a result of recent changes in the world political scene, the Commission's membership had increased considerably, as had its role in the overall European process. Additional funding was urgently needed, and he urged the Council to bring the matter to the attention of the General Assembly.

The Secretary-General's report on the Non-Governmental Organizations Unit (E/1992/63) was useful, although the section entitled "Concluding observations" contained none. His delegation would support a draft resolution calling upon the Secretary-General to take appropriate measures aimed at increasing the resources available to the Unit not only during the current programme budget biennium but in the next one also; and hoped that such a move would be widely supported. Enhancing the role of that Unit would be a major first step towards overcoming the difficulties frequently encountered in relations between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations.

Mr. MARKS (United States of America) generally welcomed the new format for the Council's sessions. The deliberations during the high-level segment, including the one-day discussion with representatives of the international financial institutions, had been stimulating, although more candour would have been welcome. Discussion in the coordination segment could have been more fruitful, and would be in future if it focused on efforts to deal with particular issues rather than on the issues themselves. He was sure, however, that genuine dialogue would develop since the opportunity had been created. It would help, in that regard, if the relevant documentation was circulated in good time and concentrated on the main issues.

The chief agent in revitalization was the Council itself. The case for reforming the economic and social sectors of the Organization was well established, the joint Nordic memorandum (E/1992/91) having provided interesting proposals for that purpose. The action should cover certain broad categories. One was a reform of intergovernmental institutions in general,

(Mr. Marks, United States)

and the Council in particular; his delegation appreciated the work already done by the Secretary-General in that regard. Another was the reform of operational activities at the field level; his delegation had made a detailed proposal in that regard during the current session. A third category was the reform and reorganization of operational organs and bodies at the Headquarters level, including the Secretariat, which would mean strengthening the links between them, the better to coordinate guidance and feedback. The ad hoc working group recently established by the President had the heavy responsibility of initiating a close review of the Council. In carrying out that task, it should be remembered that the operational role assumed by the Organization over the years should remain a secondary function.

Coordination of assistance activities was vital in order to ensure that United Nations assistance was put to the best use. While uniformity of governance of the four operational agencies, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and UNFPA should be ensured through a single entity, there was no need to establish a new body for that purpose; the Council, suitably strengthened, could and should do the job. As part of its annual sessions, it could carry out the functions currently performed by the other bodies' governing bodies, and could be assisted, between sessions, by small executive committees to monitor performance, decide on plans and budgets, and examine new programme initiatives. The restructuring of the Council's subsidiary bodies would also have to be dealt with. For example, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development might well be combined with the proposed Commission on Sustainable Development. In that light, the new mandates proposed in document E/1992/76 should be submitted to the General Assembly for consideration.

Mr. JIN Yongjian (China) said that the revitalization of the Council was an integral part of the Organization's restructuring in the economic, social and related fields; specific recommendations and proposals should be placed within that overall context in order to ensure a balanced outcome. It was necessary, therefore, before making any further revitalization efforts, to ascertain the United Nations true development role and improve the division of labour between the Council and the General Assembly.

(Mr. Jin Yongjian, China)

In selecting themes for discussion in the Council's high-level segment, the multi-year work programme and new development trends must be considered. Population and development should be the theme selected for the high-level segment of the Council's next substantive session, in order that the Council could play a major role in preparations for the forthcoming conference on the subject. With reference to the theme for the coordination segment, his delegation endorsed the Secretary-General's recommendation on a multi-year work programme, and suggested that the subject to be discussed at the next substantive session should be environment and development. His delegation also applauded the Secretary-General's recommendation that similar or closely related agenda items should be properly grouped, and stressed the importance of efforts to ensure timely circulation and improved quality of documents.

Mr. ARELLANO (Mexico) said that the report of the Secretary-General (E/1992/86) outlined the obstacles still to be overcome in implementing the measures agreed upon for revitalizing the Council. The political will evinced in the adoption of General Assembly resolution 45/264 must be maintained. The basic guidelines established in that resolution, particularly with regard to democratic participation in decision-taking, must be borne in mind, and the restructuring must be carried out with due regard to the principles enshrined in the Charter, particularly those of respect for sovereignty and of the sovereign equality of Member States. The spheres of competence of the system's various bodies must likewise be respected, and the end result must genuinely contribute to the economic and social development of the countries most in need.

Operational activities were an important aspect of international cooperation for development; but efforts to improve their efficiency must not adversely affect the broader issues related to the basic mandates envisaged in the Charter. In the current first phase of implementation, care must be taken to ensure that all innovative proposals were carefully considered, in order to maintain the transparency of debate enjoyed hitherto and avoid any deviation from the true objectives. Development and international cooperation were valid issues in their own right, and his delegation was slightly concerned by the tendency to subordinate them to other issues in discussions on the role of

(Mr. Arellano, Mexico)

the United Nations. The purpose of restructuring the Council was to foster international cooperation for development; the aim should be to strengthen the Council, not to weaken it.

Mr. KASOULIDES (Observer for Cyprus) said that his country attached great importance to the effective functioning of the Non-Governmental Organizations Unit. The importance of the NGO's role had been recognized from the Organization's inception; their participation had been institutionalized by means of Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) and had been enhanced through the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations and the Non-Governmental Organizations Unit. Not only did non-governmental organizations make a valuable contribution to the work of the United Nations and its specialized agencies but they also were a link between international bodies and ordinary citizens. Cyprus therefore welcomed the news contained in the Secretary-General's report (E/1992/63) that the Non-Governmental Organizations Unit, had seen its workload increased tenfold. Given the wide variety and increased functions assigned to the Unit, its human and financial resources should be increased.

The role of non-governmental organizations was everywhere recognized, especially in activities related to the Commission on Human Rights and its Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. The international community should show its gratitude to the dedicated groups and individuals who, disregarding their own safety, acted as the conscience of mankind.

Finally, noting that the forthcoming World Conference on Human Rights would provide a forum for assessing progress in the field of human rights, examining means of strengthening the implementation of existing standards and breaking new ground in the interrelationship of State and world community, he said that preparations for that conference, and for other scheduled conferences would be facilitated by applying the "Draft standard rules of procedure for United Nations conferences".

Mr. BUTLER (Australia) said that there was a clear need to revitalize the Economic and Social Council. The failure to close the development gap and the poverty gap, despite the resources and time devoted to

(Mr. Butler, Australia)

that end, was a clear indication that something was wrong. The Council needed to return to basics and ask itself whether it was fulfilling the requirements laid down in the United Nations Charter. He agreed with the Secretary-General that the Council had a role to play under the Charter in its sphere of competence broadly similar to that performed by the Security Council in the field of peace and security. In that connection, Chapter X of the Charter provided all the guidance necessary and clearly set out the fundamental goals to be pursued.

With regard to operational principles for the future work of the Council, he felt that all proposals should be judged by the criterion of effectiveness in revitalizing the Council, regardless of whether or not they met particular concerns, such as staffing levels or cost. In addition, responsibility for particular tasks should be allocated clearly to the various organs within the United Nations system and, in considering institutional proposals, it was vital to ensure that tasks were carried out only once. The present critical juncture offered an extraordinary opportunity for change, which must be seized since it might not recur.

He drew attention to what might be called the "reality gap" affecting the Council's work, which was reflected in a tendency to confuse talk with action. Frequently, if a matter had been sufficiently discussed, it was deemed to have been dealt with. Finally, the question of information was of the utmost importance. Accurate and relevant information was vital in order to take sound policy decisions and, in that connection, he welcomed the proposal by the representative of Austria concerning a comprehensive periodic report on the state of environment and development, and hoped that the matter would be taken up in the ad hoc working group.

Mr. BAHADIAN (Brazil) said that effective implementation of the agreements on environment and development reached in Rio must be one of the highest priorities. The institutional arrangements for follow-up activities would be discussed at the forthcoming session of the General Assembly. Discussions should cover such questions as the location, membership, rules of procedure and precise mandate of the Commission on Sustainable Development; the size, status and location of its secretariat structure; and guidelines for

(Mr. Bahadian, Brazil)

coordination. It was also important to determine the modalities for the rapid implementation of the decisions on desertification and to ensure system-wide coordination in the implementation of the Conference's decisions.

Since the Commission on Sustainable Development was intended to serve as a high-level forum for the institutional follow-up to the Rio Conference, its establishment should not be seen as part of the restructuring process, which was geared to improving the functioning of the United Nations system in promoting the economic growth and development of developing countries. The establishment of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, the consolidated mandates of the Committee on Natural Resources and the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy (Council decision 1992/218) were part of that process.

Mr. Amaziane (Morocco) (Vice-President), took the Chair.

Mr. RYSINSKI (Poland) welcomed the many new proposals put forward during the high-level segment, particularly those by the Nordic countries on governance and finance. The setting up of an intersessional reform mechanism might be complemented by extending the work of the Council's Bureau into the intersessional period and making use of its monitoring capacity.

The international community appeared to be ready to overhaul a large part of the system of governance and management of the economic and social sectors at intergovernmental and Secretariat levels, and sufficient momentum had been generated for establishing a new partnership of multilateral interests. There was growing recognition of the need to focus attention and resources on international cooperation and development, and adopt a pragmatic approach by determining major areas of focus within a multi-year programme, to be reviewed and adjusted as needed.

In seeking to revitalize the Council, it was vital to clarify the responsibilities of the different bodies dealing with economic and social issues and stress their complementary nature. In that connection, the role of regional bodies should be enhanced and their activities focused on cross-sectoral issues with a clear-cut division of labour and efforts to avoid duplication.

(Mr. Rysinski, Poland)

Noting that a number of proposals had been put forward during the high-level segment, he said that changes in the Secretariat were crucial to revitalization and should lead to stricter determination of managerial and operational responsibilities so as to streamline structures and improve performance in the interests of better coordination and leadership. The same was true in the field, where the role of resident coordinators and regional bureaux needed to be strengthened. Highly qualified and motivated staff were needed to tackle newly emerging issues. New blood was vital to avoid the dangers of fatigue and inertia, and increased emphasis should be placed on productivity and competition to encourage performance. The need to ensure equitable geographical and gender representation must also be borne in mind.

Mr. SEZAKI (Japan) said that, although important and timely, the subjects chosen for both the high-level segment and the coordination segment had been much too broad, making it difficult to achieve a convergence of views or hold a focused discussion. If the segments were to be successful, it was vital to select appropriate themes. The failure of many of the heads of the multilateral financial and trade institutions, specialized agencies and United Nations bodies to comply with the request to circulate their statements in advance and present their positions concisely had also been unfortunate. The limited time available for the high-level policy dialogue with the Bretton Woods institutions had made it difficult for the large number of delegations to address the issues on the agenda productively. However, it would be difficult to resolve that problem without taking up the question of the number of participants.

He welcomed the consolidation of the various economic and social units of the Secretariat into a single department and expressed the hope that it would discharge its responsibilities more effectively. He stressed that any units set up as part of the follow-up to the Rio Conference should come under the Department of Economic and Social Development and be based in New York.

His delegation opposed the suggeston that the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly should be abolished. They performed necessary functions and should be maintained. Adjustments should be made within the Council in order to avoid overlapping with the work of the General Assembly.

(Mr. Sezaki, Japan)

With regard to the functions of an international development council proposed by the Nordic countries, his delegation agreed on the need to reform the system-wide intergovernmental bodies for operational activities and believed that the issue should be addressed as part of the reform of the Economic and Social Council.

The proposal for the introduction of an intersessional mechanism deserved close consideration. Such a mechanism should be established only to cope with situations which could not be dealt with by convening a special session of the Council, as provided for under the existing rules of procedure. His delegation remained open to any firm proposals which might be made, but stressed that the mandate and composition of any mechanism would have to be studied carefully.

Finally, it was unfortunate that virtually none of the documents had been circulated sufficiently in advance. He urged the Secretariat to resolve the continuing problems in that area and expressed support for the proposal put forward in the report of the Secretary-General (E/1992/86) that the Council should consider reducing the number of items on its agenda through further consolidation or biennialization.

Ms. ARYSTANBEKOVA (Observer for Kazakhstan) said that the various proposals put forward with a view to rationalizing the operational activities of the United Nations system merited careful consideration.

Like other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Kazakhstan was engaged in the transition to a market economy. Several months previously the President of the Republic had outlined his strategy for the consolidation of Kazakhstan as a sovereign State, defining it as a policy aimed at securing an open economy and rapid development in a society based on democracy, the rule of law, and respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual.

Her delegation was confident that Kazakhstan would succeed in taking its place in the world economy. Measures were being taken to stabilize the economy and strengthen the financial system, to reduce inflation, to reform taxation and to implement a programme aimed at privatization and freedom from State control. Everything possible was being done to create an economic union

(Ms. Arystanbekova, Observer, Kazakhstan)

within the framework of the former USSR on the basis of free trade and unrestricted circulation of goods, capital, labour and services.

To achieve those goals it was essential to make use of the accumulated international experience in solving economic and social problems. Kazakhstan was counting on close cooperation with the United Nations system; it would very shortly become a member of the Bretton Woods institutions.

Mr. HUSLID (Observer for Norway), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, said that the consolidated session of the Economic and Social Council had proved very positive, particularly with regard to the high-level segment. The agreement to set up a working group to prepare specific proposals for the forthcoming General Assembly would undoubtedly maintain and increase the momentum already gained. The dialogue between Member States and the heads of key organizations and agencies had proved very profitable in addressing the system-wide efforts to eradicate poverty and to combat AIDS.

Some practical adjustments in the working schedules of the Council and its subsidiary bodies would no doubt be needed in order to tackle unforeseen problems, such as undue delays in the confirmation of the mandates of various working groups and rapporteurs, and more seriously, the late issuance of most of the important documentation for the session.

It was clear that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development would have a major influence on the agenda of the United Nations in the years to come. In the Nordic delegations' view, the United Nations system as a whole must be strengthened in order to deal effectively with environment and development in a truly integrated manner, and it was noteworthy in that regard that the Council had been accorded the important responsibility of considering the reports of the Commission on Sustainable Development before they came before the General Assembly.

Both the Council and the United Nations as a whole must become more active in international economic cooperation. In the division of responsibilities it was essential that the United Nations retain and strengthen its analytical capabilities so that economic thinking and debate were not left exclusively to the international financial institutions and trade organizations.

(Mr. Huslid, Observer, Norway)

The Nordic delegations were pleased to note what could be described as partial success in achieving partial reform. The inadequacies of the Economic and Social Council did not reside solely in the structure and functioning of the Council itself, but also in its agenda and in the quality of the inputs it received, in addition to the problem of its relationship with subsidiary bodies in the economic and social fields on the one hand, and the General Assembly on the other. The specific changes agreed with regard to the format of the Council should be regarded as a first step: for reform to succeed, a subsidiary apparatus of high professional quality was required. At the current session the Council was called upon to fill the vacancies on the three new expert bodies established in pursuance of the reform efforts undertaken at the forty-sixth session of the General Assembly. However, the reform of only three subsidiary bodies was much too modest an accomplishment for a General Assembly which had had a much wider mandate for change. There was a need to regain momentum in reforming the subsidiary apparatus in order to achieve a more effective United Nations role in international economic dialogue.

The Nordic delegations looked forward to the next important stages of the revitalization process, including the review of ways to enhance the complementarity of the work of the Council and the Assembly in accordance with Article 60 of the Charter. It was important not to discuss the same issues three times over - initially in a subsidiary body that was supposed to be composed of experts but in fact consisted of representatives from the Second and Third Committees of the Council, subsequently in the Council itself, and finally in the General Assembly. In conclusion, the Nordic delegations stressed that institutional changes were of little use if the improved institutions were not properly utilized. Member Governments had a responsibility to ensure that the Council could fulfil its mandate, in conjunction with the General Assembly, as the central body in the United Nations system as a whole for policy dialogue and coordination in the economic and social fields, to which the dimension of sustainable development had now been added.

Ms. CASTANO (Colombia) said that the current session had offered a useful opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures adopted under

(Ms. Castano, Colombia)

General Assembly resolution 45/264, and her delegation wished to participate actively in the open-ended working group established to continue deliberations.

In addition to the difficulties mentioned by the representative of Pakistan, she wished to highlight the problem of coordinating the sessions of the Council and its subsidiary bodies. The fact that the Secretariat had been authorized to take interim administrative measures regarding the mandates of the Commission on Human Rights should be regarded as exceptional, since such an authorization was contrary to the spirit of resolution 45/264.

Revitalization should not be linked to the establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development or the Council's new subsidiary bodies dealing with natural resources and new and renewable sources of energy and science and technology for development; the latter were the outcome of protracted intergovernmental negotiations and their autonomy should not be prejudiced.

Mrs. HARRIS (Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council) said that the members of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (CONGO) had affiliates or members in virtually every country of the world, and played an essential role in implementing economic and social programmes. Interaction with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had two major aspects. One was to introduce wider perspectives in international policy-making bodies, reflecting the knowledge and experience of members based in many countries, and the other was to stimulate activity at the operational level. A concerted effort was needed to revise and strengthen the relationship between the NGOs in consultative status and the United Nations system, recognizing the potential of the former as essential partners. That would depend on having a strong United Nations focal point and on a very considerable reinforcement of the Non-Governmental Organizations Unit. It would also require guidelines regarding NGO participation in the planning for major United Nations conferences to be held over the next few years. The NGO community had organized many successful forums in connection with such conferences in previous decades, and it looked forward to enlarging that concept in order to

(Mrs. Harris)

involve NGOs, governments and international secretariats in the public debate on issues of world concern. In order to contribute effectively in such discussions, NGOs needed timely access to documents.

The NGOs were very interested in developing their relationship with the United Nations at the regional level, and plans were being made to encourage NGO members to take part in regional meetings scheduled in connection with forthcoming United Nations conferences. In conclusion, she said that the expertise available within the non-governmental organizations should be drawn upon more systematically by the United Nations system. CONGO had prepared many reports and discussion papers over the years with a view to enhancing and facilitating a constructive relationship, and would be pleased to share that material.

Ms. WIENER (World Federation of United Nations Associations) said that a review of the functioning of the secretariat structure which serviced close to 950 non-governmental organizations in consultative status was long overdue as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (E/1992/63). The important role played by the non-governmental organizations in consultative status had been recognized with increasing frequency in the resolutions adopted by all intergovernmental bodies, and had been emphasized in several statements by the Secretary-General.

The question of the NGO contribution to the preparatory process for United Nations conferences, and their participatory rights in those conferences, would again be raised in connection with the adoption of the rules of procedure for several forthcoming United Nations conferences.

She drew the Council's attention to the fact that, in the case of international conferences convened by the Council under Article 62, paragraph 4, of the Charter, paragraph 34 of Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968 applied. In the case of conferences convened by the General Assembly, she recommended that the sections relevant to NGOs contained in the "Draft standard rules of procedure for United Nations conferences" should be applied. Those rules, although not formally adopted by the General Assembly, had served as a useful guideline in the case of several United Nations conferences. In her view, application of those rules would ensure consistency

(Ms. Wiener)

in dealings with NGOs, both in terms of invitations and participatory rights. It would also help to avoid time-consuming debates, unnecessary controversies and efforts to invent new procedures. Such matters could usefully be entrusted to the Non-Governmental Organizations Unit.

At its 1991 session, the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations had called on NGOs to utilize the possibilities offered by their consultative status to the fullest extent, but they could do so only if they were able to rely on a secretariat structure with sufficient resources and time to assist them in channelling their contributions and exercising their consultative status. Clearly, however, the Non-Governmental Organizations Unit, which had only two Professional and two General Service staff members at its disposal, could not continue to cope with its ever-increasing workload. It was high time that the importance of NGOs in consultative status was reflected in a review and upgrading of the Unit, to ensure that its resources were commensurate with its responsibilities.

Ms. von ROEMER (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) said that the situation of the Non-Governmental Organizations Unit was indeed grave and called for urgent remedial action. Statistics alone bore that out: in 1948 there had been 41 accredited NGOs with approximately 100 representatives. In 1992 those members had increased to 943, and approximately 2,000 representatives - an increase of 2,200 per cent. Yet the size of the Unit servicing the NGOs had remained the same. Moreover, there was every indication that NGOs would continue to proliferate.

While relations between NGOs and the United Nations had earlier been marred by a great deal of scepticism and mistrust, that situation had improved considerably. That was reflected in the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, which had transformed itself from something of a battleground into a serious and competent body providing valuable support to the NGO community.

A strengthening and upgrading of the Non-Governmental Organizations Unit would give concrete expression to the positive attitude towards NGOs, and would signify that the United Nations was taking the partnership seriously.

(Ms. von Roemer)

Moreover, it would save time and resources in other parts of the Organization if the Unit were in a position to carry out the various mandates originally assigned to it, in particular its responsibility for servicing the participation of NGOs in United Nations conferences. Lately that function had been taken entirely out of its hands, resulting in much confusion and frustration. She wondered why there should be a Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, which worked hard to determine which organizations were worthy of accreditation and to which category they should be assigned, if the preparatory committee for every large-scale United Nations conference and the secretariat assigned to it proceeded, as it were, to reinvent the wheel. At the latest conference, the result had been the accreditation on an equal footing of scores of groups with no previous links to the United Nations, some of them with as few as two members, or even no members at all. The new tendency to assign all NGOs to a regional category according to the location of their headquarters also indicated a lack of understanding, as did the attempt to assign NGOs to different sectors. The Non-Governmental Organizations Unit should be involved in each step of the preparations for a conference, including accreditation, from the very beginning. She therefore urged the Council to take immediate measures to enable the Non-Governmental Organizations Unit to fulfil all of its mandates, particularly in view of the preparations now under way for forthcoming major conferences.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.